President's Report 2000-2001

Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales

presented at the annual general meeting on 20th October 2001

The year since the last AGM has been a particularly busy one with the hosting of a Flying-fox Forum and an Urban Wildlife Forum. Both were exceptionally well attended, and both were extremely relevant to the main objects of the Society; namely, to promote, preserve and conserve the indigenous animals of Australia and their associated habitats. We have changed the way we publish the books (formerly called transactions) emanating from our conferences, as well as the *Australian Zoologist,* in order to minimise costs. Shortly, all back issues of RZS publications will be available for sale via our Web page.

Symposium and Forum

In July 2001 we hosted a forum on the Grey-headed Flying-fox, which was partially sponsored by the NSW NPWS, and the Australian Museum provided the venue free of charge. Over 150 people attended and discussed, in a rational and constructive manner, ways in which to manage this newly-listed vulnerable species on the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and the need for NPWS to phase out their current policy of allowing some culling of this species by orchardists. The proceedings are currently being edited by Peggy Eby and Dan Lunney and will appear in 2002 as an RZS publication. Considerable media interest was generated by the forum, which also helps to advertise the work of the Society.

In 20 October 2001 we hosted a forum on Urban Wildlife, with the venue at Taronga Zoo being provided free of charge. It provided a very interesting and broadly based discussion on the problems of urban conservation. Talks ranged from changing bird populations associated with increasing urbanisation, to those dealing with endangered snail populations on the Cumberland Plain. Others dealt with species which benefit from urbanization, such as the silver gulls, and the impact of households feeding native wildlife. Dan Lunney and Shelley Burgin were the organisers and did a great job, although many other members of Council helped on the day with registration, organising the audio visuals and helping during question time. As usual, the day was recorded and we look forward to seeing the Proceedings in print. For the first time, demand to present a paper exceeded the available time so some papers were presented as posters.

Unfortunately the Student Conference had to be cancelled but Council is determined to host it during next year, albeit in a revised format. Details will be posted on the Society's web page and distributed to University Departments. Council regards this training and encouragement of the next generation of zoologists as a very important one and we will consult widely as to the best format for next year's Conference.

Publications

Publications and their distribution represent the major expenditure of the Society and it was with some reluctance that we severed our ties with Surrey Beatty and Sons who have been our printers for many years. From the end of 2000 we contracted out the page setting and printing to different firms to reduce the costs, and the Society now distributes the copies and retains the surplus stock, which will be sold through our web site. While Dan Lunney remains as Editor, and Brad Law the co-editor, an Editorial Committee has been established to spread the workload of the *Australian Zoologist*, although it is still considerable, thank you to the editors.

Gilly Simpson, our Executive Officer, organised the relocation of the existing books and publications, which Surrey Beatty had in storage, to a warehouse and organised the disposal of surplus stock. Gilly will be in charge of sending out orders received via the web and will be checking out other venues where the publications can be sold. Gilly has taken on this task with enthusiasm and the Council is very appreciative of her initiatives and hard work, which will certainly help the Society's finances. After many years of debate we have finally sold our rare book collection as the cost of insuring this asset was prohibitive and the books were deteriorating because they were not being kept in ideal conditions and the potential for theft was considerable. I would like to thank Jean-Claude Herremans who willingly took on the task of finding a buyer and the best price.

During the year, the Dingo Symposium was published, which was edited by Chris Dickman and Dan Lunney. It covers the successful Symposium held in May 1999. The costs of printing were subsidized by the NSW Scientific Committee (under the TSC Act) and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. In addition Volume 31 (no 3) December 2000 and Vol. 31 (No 4) July 2001 of the *Australian Zoologist* were published.

Funds were received from the NSW EPA Education Trust to revise and republish the *Conservation of Australia's Forest Fauna*. This book has been such a good seller, but much new work has been done since the original publication in 1991 that a revision is certainly needed.

The Society publications continue to receive much attention and the forum publications provide a very good review of the current status of knowledge on selected topics. For example, the Dingo Symposium will help the Scientific Committee established under the TSC Act in its deliberations as to whether populations of this species should be declared endangered in NSW or not.

Ethel Mary Read Research Grants

This year there were 27 applications for funding from the Ethel Read Research Grants Scheme, and 9 grants awarded, each of $600. The applications covered a wide range of taxa and geographical spread and from a variety of Universities. I should like to thank Arthur White and the 2001 EMR Committee (Brad Law, Will Meikle, Noel Tait and Peggy Eby) for judging these student applications.

Again we will encourage these students to publish their results in the publications of the Society. Calls for applications for 2002, and the information required, are available from the Society's web page.

Whitleys

Each year the Society makes a series of Whitley awards in a variety of categories for the best books published on Australian zoology during the past year. The 2001 winners are presented in this edition of the *Australian Zoologist.*

Arthur White chaired the sub committee, which consisted of Noel Tait, Peter Wilson, Shelley Burgin, which assessed these books and CD. The awards were presented at the Australian Museum in August 2001. Thank you Arthur and your sub committee for this difficult but hopefully rewarding task.

Communication with members

Council has tried hard during the year to communicate with the members, primarily through the Newsletter which Peter Wilson has so ably co-ordinated. Members can elect to receive this either by mail or electronically and we encourage members to elect to receive it electronically as this is much cheaper. Peter has also been continually updating our web site and, increasingly, people are using this as a means of registering for meetings and obtaining information re the Whitleys and the EMR awards. Shortly we will be advertising publications for sale on the web site. Council is very grateful to Peter for this important asset of the society.

Peter Wilson has also been instrumental with Jean Claude Herremans of updating our computer system and organising our membership database so that we can keep better track of our members.

Financial matters

It is with regret that I have to thank the outgoing Treasurer Mr Jim Mein who has retired on health grounds. Jim has been instrumental in reorganising the books and making us think seriously about our publishing costs and the need to rein these in. We wish Jim a happy retirement. We advertised for a replacement and were extremely lucky that an ordinary member, Mr Ian Langford-Brown, responded. He is a qualified chartered accountant so once again we have the management of our finances in expert hands. Ian has already been to a couple of Council meetings and will continue the practice begun by Jim of ensuring that we live within our means and he will shortly begin the process of computerising our accounts which will make preparing them for audits so much easier. I welcome Ian to Council and look forward to working with him.

Council

While the President is the figurehead of the Society, most of the work is done by the Council and I have been extremely lucky to have a very active and hard working Council, and I am very pleased that all bar one have agreed to continue for the forthcoming year. Council meetings, which occur every 2 months, are extremely full and much is achieved during them. However, much activity takes place outside these meetings. Peter Wilson has been a very supportive Secretary but will not be standing for this post next year, although he fortunately will remain on Council as Newsletter editor. Thank you Peter.

The pressure on our biodiversity continues and our Society recognises that development and growth remain the dominant paradigm. Our Society has a major role to try and change these views and our recent forums have in some ways addressed these problems. For example, one of the major reasons that there are concerns within the community re the Grey-headed Flying-foxes is that we have reduced the native vegetation on which these animals feed and they have had to resort to feeding on the many ornamentals which have been planted in our gardens and parks as well as fruit trees in order to survive. This leads to conflicts, which need to be resolved to the benefit of both the flying-foxes and to us. Finally I would like to thank you, the members, for continuing to support the Society by coming to meetings, paying your subscriptions and we hope that all of you will try to recruit additional members as the Society needs an active and involved membership if we are to maintain our role in trying to conserve and maintain our natural biodiversity.

Pat Hutchings